WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An apparatus for determining a channel state of a set top box, the apparatus comprising:

a sensing stage capable to detect light intensity from various positions on a display and generating output signals based on light intensity detected from each of the various positions;

a comparison stage communicatively coupled to the sensing stage and capable to generate digital values by comparison of each generated output signals with a threshold value; and

an interface communicatively coupled to the sensing stage and capable to generate a feedback signal based upon the digital values to indicate a channel state of the set top box.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the feedback signal is transmitted to a companion box device for processing, thereby permitting the companion box device to detect the channel state of the set top box.

3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the sensing stage comprises a plurality of light sensing devices, each of the

light sensing devices capable to detect light intensity at a corresponding position on the display.

4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the sensing stage comprises an array of light sensing devices capable to detect light intensity at the various positions on the display.

5. An apparatus for detecting a channel state of a set top box, the apparatus comprising:

a sensing stage capable to sense output light from a plurality of light-sensing elements in a display of a set top box;

an engine capable to determine a channel state of the display based on the output;

a channel state analysis engine capable to compare the determined channel state with a desired channel state; and

a response engine capable to send a change channel command to the set top box if the determined channel state does not match the desired channel state.

6. A method of determining a channel state of a set top box, the method comprising:

detecting states of light emitting devices in a display of a set top box;

generating an analog value based on each detected state;

comparing each analog value with a threshold value and generating a digital value for each compared analog value; and

transmitting to a companion box device a bit stream having the generated digital values to permit the companion box device to determine a channel state of the set top box.

7. A method of determining a channel state of a set top box, the method comprising:

detecting states of light emitting devices in a display of a set top box;

generating a feedback signal based on the detected states;

determining a channel state of the set top box based on the feedback signal; and

comparing the determined channel state with a desired channel state.

8. A set top box channel state system, comprising:

a device including a plurality of light-sensing elements communicatively coupled to a display of a set top box, the display including a plurality of light emitting devices; and

a companion box device communicatively coupled to the light-sensing elements, the companion box device including

an infrared blaster capable to send commands via an IR beam to the set top box,

a character recognition engine capable to determine set top box channel state as displayed on the display based on the output of the light-sensing elements,

a channel state analysis engine communicatively coupled to the character recognition engine and capable to determine if the channel state matches a desired channel state, and

a response engine communicatively coupled to the analysis engine and the IR blaster and capable to command the IR blaster to send a change channel command via IR beam to the set top box if the channel state does not match the desired channel state.

9. The set top box channel state system of claim 8, wherein the plurality of light-sensing elements is equal in number to the plurality of light emitting devices in the display.

10. The set top box channel state system of claim 8, wherein the light-sensing elements are arranged in an array.

11. The set top box channel state system of claim 10, wherein the array includes 32 by 16 light-sensing elements.

12. The set top box channel state system of claim 8, wherein the device includes a second display configured to display the set top box channel state.

13. The set top box channel state system of claim 8, wherein the light-sensing elements include photodiodes.

14. A method of detecting a channel state of a set top box, the method comprising:

sampling output from a plurality of light-sensing elements coupled to a display of a set top box;

determining a channel state of the display based on the output;

comparing the determined channel state with a desired channel state; and

sending a change channel command to the set top box if the determined channel state does not match the desired channel state.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the determining the channel state includes using character recognition software.

16. The method of claim 14, wherein the determining the channel state includes comparing the output with values in a look-up table.

17. The method of claim 14, wherein the light-sensing elements are photodiodes.

18. The method of claim of claim 14, wherein the plurality of light-sensing elements is equal in number to a plurality of light-emitting devices in the display.

19. The method of claim 14, wherein the plurality of light-sensing elements are arranged in an array.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the array includes 32 by 16 light-sensing elements.

21. The method of claim 14, further comprising displaying the determined channel state on a second display.

22. A machine-readable medium having stored thereon instructions to:

sample output from a plurality of light-sensing elements coupled to a display of a set top box;

determine a channel state of the display based on the output;

compare the determined channel state with a desired channel state; and

send a change channel command to the set top box if the determined channel state does not match the desired channel state.

23. The machine-readable medium of claim 22, wherein the determining the channel state includes using character recognition software.

24. The machine-readable medium of claim 22, wherein the determining the channel state includes comparing the output with values in a look-up table.

25. The machine-readable medium of claim 22, further comprising an instruction to display the determined channel state on a second display.

26. A system for detecting a channel state of a set top box, the method comprising:

means for sampling output from a plurality of light-sensing elements coupled to a display of a set top box;

means for determining a channel state of the display based on the output;

means for comparing the determined channel state with a desired channel state; and

means for sending a change channel command to the set top box if the determined channel state does not match the desired channel state.